

Talent, Innovation, Values

An Interview with Rodney W. Zimmel,
Managing Partner, Northeast United States, McKinsey & Company

EDITORS' NOTE Rodney Zimmel was previously leader of McKinsey's Healthcare Practice. He has helped develop strategies for clients responding to major market disruptions such as U.S. healthcare reform and R&D productivity challenges. Zimmel has worked extensively on mergers and acquisitions, partnerships, organizational transformation, and post-merger integrations. He received his M.A. in natural sciences and his Ph.D. in molecular biology from Trinity College, Cambridge University.



Rodney W. Zimmel

COMPANY BRIEF McKinsey & Company (mckinsey.com) is a global management consulting firm, deeply committed to helping institutions in the private, public, and social sectors achieve lasting success. For 90 years, its primary objective has been to serve as its clients' most trusted external advisor. With consultants in over 120 cities in over 60 countries, across many industries and functions, it brings unparalleled expertise to clients anywhere in the world. It works closely with teams at all levels of an organization to shape winning strategies, mobilize for change, build capabilities, and drive successful execution.

What makes McKinsey so special and how do you define the McKinsey difference?

First, it is people and the quality of our talent. Our consistent approach to recruiting and investing in our people is McKinsey's biggest differentiator.

Second, it's our innovation. We are constantly upgrading the capabilities that we bring to our clients. Recently this has included acquiring leading firms in advanced analytics and design, as well as hiring more experts in areas such as digital transformation, machine learning, and corporate restructuring.

The third differentiator is our values. Amid all that is changing at our firm, we maintain our focus on taking an independent perspective to make a real difference to an institution's performance and health.

How much of your talent recruitment is about culture fit?

It is very hard to hire for culture fit since we recruit people from such diverse backgrounds. Instead, we hire for values – those who join McKinsey do so because they want to

apply their talents to solving the most complex and important challenges.

Also, the definition of who we're looking for has evolved quite a bit. We've added new areas of expertise, including advanced analytics, design, software solutions, and digital, and the people we've hired in these new areas now account for one-third of our total professional staff.

Where is innovation taking place, and how critical is it to have an innovative culture within McKinsey?

Entrepreneurship has always been intrinsic to McKinsey's culture. In fact, the catch-phrase "Make your own McKinsey" has emerged over the years to describe our environment, which encourages blazing new paths and finding opportunities. Throughout our history, we've consistently reinvented the firm to best serve our clients. Recently, as businesses have faced more rapid transformation and disruption, we also have accelerated our pace of change in innovating how we work to deliver value. One example of this is the creation of the McKinsey New Ventures team, which focuses on identifying and fostering innovations from around the firm and integrating them into our client service.

Today, we're doing whole sets of things we wouldn't have dreamt would be possible before. Core areas of the firm like strategy and org design continue to grow, but emerging areas like digital, analytics, and operations are growing even faster, really creating a new McKinsey within McKinsey.

Are large global players McKinsey's client focus, and how important is working with small, entrepreneurial growth companies?

Certainly we're serving many of the leading global companies and continue to build our client service for them, but we have added a tremendous number of new opportunities in midsize and smaller companies. We have a practice that is specifically focused on serving select startups, those with series A-C type funding. We're serving many of the digital and tech innovators, so a growing part of our client service is not for traditional companies.

We also are building our network of relationships with and collaborating more with the startup community. We recently opened our New York Experience Studio, a place for leaders to share in our content and expertise in a new and dynamic way, leveraging

state-of-the-art technologies. This is purposefully located in the heart of the thriving Silicon Alley tech corridor.

In addition, our work with private equity clients is allowing us to service a whole number of portfolio companies. We have a growing public sector practice serving both federal, as well as state and local governments. We also do a lot of work in the nonprofit sector as well.

How close is the coordination from market to market at McKinsey?

The coordination is very close, and we generally act as a network among geographies, industries, and functions. One of the things that defines us is that we are one global partnership. At this point, we may be the largest unified global partnership in the world.

One of our greatest strengths is undoubtedly being one firm because of how we can mobilize our partners and people from across the globe and across industries to serve any client with our best talent.

We recognize that requires a lot more collaboration, but we think it's more effective for client service than a traditional corporate structure.

What type of a commitment does McKinsey make to community engagement?

We try to have social impact in a range of ways, including through client work and pro bono projects and by developing and sharing knowledge on the biggest issues facing society. Our people take the lead in contributing to our community. Many firm members sit on the boards of nonprofit organizations at a national or local level. Over the past few years, we've completed over 250 pro bono projects, which receive the same standards of service that all of our clients expect from us.

In addition, a few years ago we decided to set up an independent nonprofit, the McKinsey Social Initiative, where we put our efforts to work as principals rather than advisors. Its first initiative, called "Generation," has the sole aim of reducing youth unemployment. We have created Accelerated Learning Programs that include rapid training for high-demand professions, placing young adults in jobs and giving them the skills and support they need to achieve enduring personal and professional success. So far, Generation has launched in 47 cities across five countries including the United States. More than 10,000 students have graduated with 84 percent now placed in jobs. ●